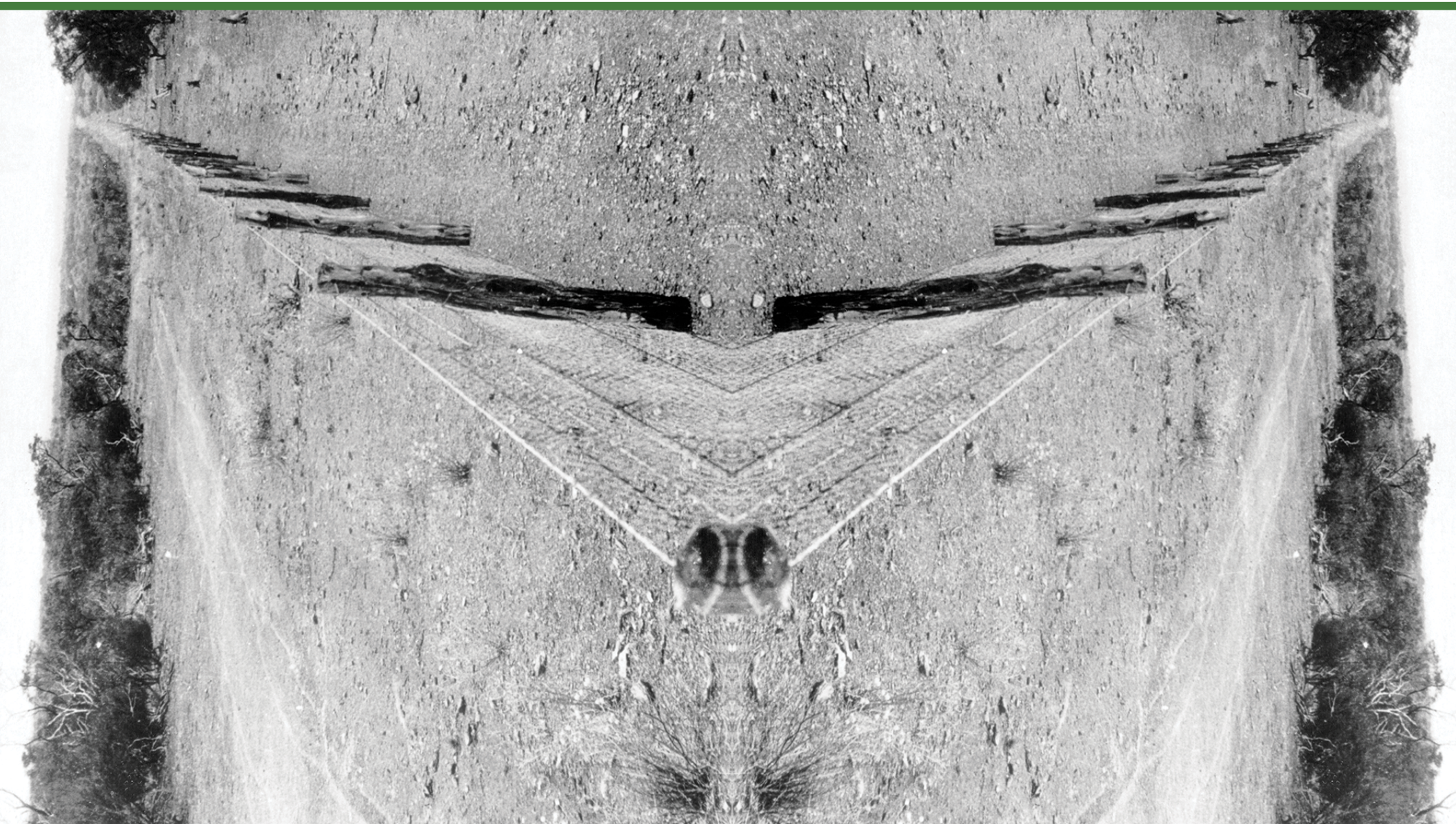
feature articles



Surveillant Movements: Policing and Spatial Production in East German Housing

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For the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) Ministry of State Security—commonly and heretofore referred to as the *Stasi*—mass housing was a primary site of mass surveillance. Housing was where people spent a considerable amount of their lives and, in contrast to spaces of work, expressed themselves relatively freely. As one of the "niches" in which East Germans found refuge from the Soviet-socialist surveillance regime of the GDR, the home became a site of the surveillance state's heightened attention.[1] The Stasi set up observation posts in key housing sites to inspect potential deviant behavior, recruited informants amongst residents, and installed listening devices in neighboring walls. Preemptive surveillance strategies targeted housing, as well. With "housing district inquiries" (*Wohngebietsermittlung*), the Stasi collected preliminary information on citizens following the Chekist objective to uncover "who is

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

[1] The term "niche society" was coined for the GDR by Günter Gaus and has since been mobilized to argue for the existence of privacy and private spheres exempt from socialist ideology and rule. See: Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983). For a discussion on Christian subculture and domestic life in the GDR as spaces of this "niche society," see: Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

who."[2] These systematic background checks were aided by an architectural counterpart, called "housing district surveys" (*Wohngebietsaufklärung*), which mapped spatial relationships between persons and buildings, uncovering "who" and "what" was "where" for surveillance operations ahead.[3]

This paper examines the Stasi's housing district surveys as a particular genre of East German state surveillance and explores the spatial modes and strategies through which East German state power operated in housing settlements. Analyzing the ways the East German secret police reproduced and used the built environment, I demonstrate that East German architecture both facilitated and complicated methods of state surveillance, ultimately resisting the panoptic aspirations of state power. I thus argue that Michel Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, which continues to be one of the leading models for interrogating the relationship between architecture and surveillance, does not fully elucidate the spatial practice and efficacy of surveillance in the GDR.[4]

The architecture of housing is no outlier to Foucault's theory of panoptic surveillance. To Foucault, Bentham's prison is an "abstraction," "a diagram of a mechanism of [disciplinary] power reduced to its ideal form."[5] While the Panopticon provides "a figure of a political technology," housing belongs to one such "political technology of the body" through which power exerts itself by spatially distributing people.[6] In Bentham's design, a central observation tower overlooks solitary cells circumscribing the circular structure. Yet, the "physics" of panoptic surveillance, asserting itself by way of architecture and geometry, can be achieved through myriad spatial-organizational regimes and established by the distribution of buildings. Key to this architectural and optical system is the observation of many by the few and the

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[2] The term "Chekist" refers to *Cheka*, the post-revolution Russian intelligence service, which provided the *Leitbild* for state security agencies across the Soviets, including the Stasi.

[3] "Aufklärung" is a complicated concept to translate both due to its weighty historical connotations and various meanings within the Stasi jargon. Agents of the East German state security apparatus' espionage and reconnaissance unit HVA, for example, were referred to as "Aufklärer," literally "enlighteners, sent out into the world" to find out and expose unknown connections between the "Western enemy forces." Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 154. "Aufklärung" means—along with "reconnaissance" and "enlightenment"—clarification, exposition, and revelation. The term is hence imbued with the meaning of visually explicating unknown connections between things. My translation relies on the definition of "Aufklärung" as "a preliminary survey to gain information." Thus, to analyze "Aufklärung" as a specific line of spatial investigative work and an activity of architectural knowledge production, I refer to it as "survey."

[4] This paper primarily relies on a reading of Foucault's chapter on panopticism, in: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 195–228.

[5] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 205.

[6] Translated from French and quoted in: Michael C. Behrent, "Foucault and Technology," *History and Technology* 29, no. 1 (2013): 55.

dissociation of the "see / being seen dyad."[7] Panoptic technologies render the surveilled fully visible while removing the watchers from sight, ultimately making the actual exercise of observation unnecessary to exert power.

Do surveillance agents become insignificant once the illusion of permanent visibility has been established, as Foucault intimates? While questions of agency, tactical co-optation, and resistance were notably left out of Foucault's analysis of panoptic power, Foucauldian panopticism also neglects the role of "watchers," as sociologist Kevin D. Haggerty notes.[8] Even though "in an ideal panoptic setting humans need not be present for the system to function," Haggerty writes, empirical findings have shown that "it matters enormously who is actually conducting surveillance," specifically because "surveillance of both people and things is typically a component of larger projects associated with a host of potential responses and interventions."[9] Exploring the role and methods of "watchers" is equally important to analyze the ways surveillance takes place in the built environment and to complicate the narrative that a "permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance" is rooted in its organization.[10] As Foucault acknowledges, "watchers" need to observe, register, and report, and to do so they need to devise certain schemes of observation: methods for selecting, classifying, and processing information, and systems of reporting.[11] Industrialized, typified, and mass produced architectural projects of "high modernism," as James C. Scott shows, constitute one such scheme of inspection and control.[12] These projects of "state simplification" rationalize and standardize social space "into a legible and administratively more convenient format," enabling the state to "see" and hence surveil.[13] Yet, investigating how power mechanisms see is not enough to account for the role of the "watchers." Surveillance is intrinsically a spatial practice and therefore we need to consider how surveillance agents move through and navigate space. With this consideration, another question arises regarding Foucault's reading of the Panopticon: does architecture act as a passive by-product of the objectives of surveillance and policing? Buildings are not merely the site but also objects of surveillance, and their spatial composition, material characteristics, and urban morphologies both shape and are shaped by surveillance. By comparatively analyzing how East German surveillance

[7] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.
[8] Kevin D. Haggerty, "Tear Down the Walls: On Demolishing the Panopticon," in *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, ed. David Lyon (London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 33–34.
[9] Haggerty, "Tear Down the Walls," 33.
[10] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 214.
[11] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 220.
[12] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 87–125.
[13] Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 3.

agents encountered, mapped, and navigated housing from Wilhelmine-era *Mietskasernen* to Soviet-socialist *Plattenbauten*, this paper will interrogate architecture not merely as a backdrop to surveillance but as an active constituent of its operations.

Surveying and Navigating Prewar Housing Settlements

The East German state security apparatus put almost 50% of the population under some form of targeted surveillance.[14] Many of these surveillance activities concentrated within East German prefabricated mass housing structures known as Plattenbauten, where one in every three East German came to live by 1990.[15] To become a resident of any Plattenbau-settlement, including the "new cities" in Berlin-Marzahn or Leipzig-Grünau, citizens had to undergo a diligent vetting process. Their party memberships, contacts with the West and even job performances were subject to the ministry's background checks. The high-density Plattenbau-settlements were—so the Cold War paranoia went—a prime target for "Western enemy forces" threatening with infiltration.[16] Thus, despite its residents' political conformity, being in the know about what goes on in and around these social housing sites remained important to the Stasi. Old residential neighborhoods, this time seen as a hotbed of "unsocialist" behavior, were also under the Stasi's heightened attention.[17] Intellectuals, artists,

[14] The Stasi pursued approximately eight million people, and recorded, classified, and indexed their activities in six million dossiers comprising 180 kilometers of files. Paul Betts, *Within Walls*, 21. The level of intervention into people's lives varied greatly, ranging anywhere from a short folder "full of boring, bureaucratic trivia" that encompassed reports from the neighborhood police, the workplace, and various informants to more intrusive—but comparatively rare—forms such as wiretapping and limited-term video surveillance. See: Robert Darnton, "The Stasi Files," in *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 170-74.

[15] As a distinctly East German building technology, the Plattenbau-system was first introduced in 1961. Over the next three decades, many Plattenbau-types were developed, all of which promised complete standardization of design, prefabrication of all components, and fully integrated industrial assembly. By 1965, the Plattenbau-system came to constitute 30% of all East German construction activities. By 1985, 85% of all housing production in the GDR was conducted with industrial construction methods, and Plattenbauten comprised 75% of it. See: Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte: Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005), 23–24.

[16] So were many "academic" studies conducted at the ministry's "spy academy" in Potsdam devoted to developing blanket observation systems for specific Plattenbau-settlements, such as: "Nutzung operativer Beobachtungsstützpunkte im Neubaugebiet Leipzig-Grünau," BArch MfS BVfS Leipzig Abt. VIII 782, 1-11; "Dokumentation und graphische Darstellung zur Nutzung operative Sicht- und Aufenthaltsstützpunkte in Leipzig-Grünau," BArch MfS BVfS Leipzig Abt VIII 367, 19-45.

[17] As Claus Bernet writes, "right up to the last years of the GDR, Wilhelmine districts were viewed as representing capitalism par excellence." Claus Bernet, "The 'Hobrecht Plan' (1862) and Berlin's Urban Structure," *Urban History* 31, no. 3 (2004): 416.

activists indeed chose to live in *Altbauten*—Wilhelmine-era tenements within the vicinity of old city centers—as a sign of their refusal of state social engineering.[18]

Surveilling and policing prewar and postwar housing required different methods due to their distinct morphologies. Wilhelmine housing conditions for the proletariat were characterized by rental barracks (*Mietskasernen*) which emerged as a product of capitalist housing production in an era of rapid industrialization. Even though they adhered to the general guidelines of their respective city plans, in the absence of building regulation and fueled by rampant land speculation, the Mietskasernen were developed as densely as possible by private landlords seeking to maximize profits. Growing from a front house into side wings and a rear house, the Mietskaserne became a tenement type: five to six stories high and circumscribing a residential lot by leaving only a small inner courtyard. Working-class residents had only communal hygiene facilities and little to no sunlight in their one-room accommodations, accessible by narrow hallways and staircases opening into the courtyard. These agglomerations of residential space tightly lined along streets, forming entire blocks with interconnecting courtyards, and hiding what came to be known as wretched quarters (*Elendsviertel*) behind their attractive neo-historicist façades.

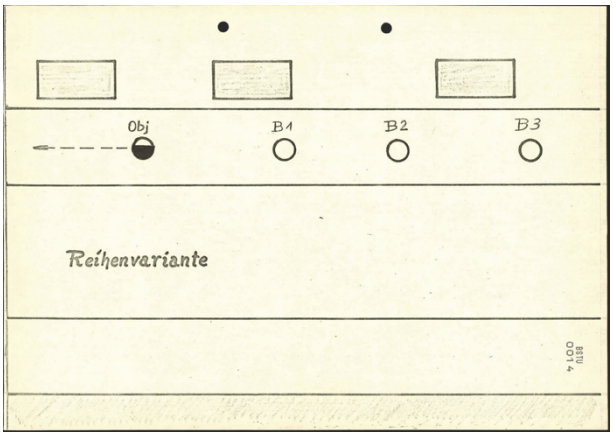
Postwar housing production in the GDR aimed to ameliorate endemic housing shortage and the "miseries" of the Wilhelmine housing stock. From the 1960s onward, new structures in prefabricated concrete sprawled across war-torn urban centers, on the peripheries of major East German cities, and at industrial sites. Following a long lineage of social housing solutions within the European modernist tradition, they were rationalized, standardized, and typified. All units had access to fresh air and sunlight, with their windows opening to expansive green fields as opposed to narrower streets or courtyards. Plattenbauten were not only social but socialist housing. With their planning, the East German state set forth the programmatic reconstruction of the society, reorganizing both domestic and urban relations anew.

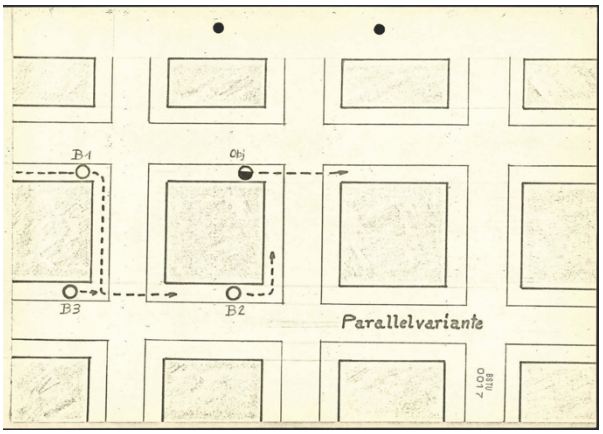
One way the Stasi responded to these different urban-residential environments was by devising so-called "observation systems" (*Beobachtungssysteme*), which choreographed the movements of surveillance agents' foot-tracking and observing subjects of interest. The objective was to orchestrate an interplay of moving and stationed "observers" so that "objects"—namely, pursued subjects—could be kept visually "under control" and their destinations could be determined.[19] Observation

[18] It is worth noting that bourgeois liberals of the Kaisserreich saw neighborhoods housing the proletariat as "breeding grounds for both radical left-wing politics and moral degeneration," only a century earlier. Rubin, "Amnesiopolis: From Mietskaserne to Wohnungsbauserie 70 in East Berlin's Northeast," *Central European History* 47 (2014): 337.

[19] "Beobachtungssysteme," BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, 13. The Stasi referred to both human subjects and buildings (*Objekthaus*, *Überwachungsobjekt*) as "objects" of surveillance.

systems considered many factors, including population and building density, the width of streets, size of building blocks, and the form of urban planning. For "quiet neighborhoods and uncrowded streets," the East German secret police recommended the use of the "sequenced" (*Reihenvariante*) and "parallel" (*Parallelvariante*) variations. In the sequenced variation, three observers (*Beobachter*) would follow their "object" by forming a straight line while constantly changing their positions (fig. 1). In the parallel variation, they would pursue their object parallel to each other across adjacent streets (fig. 2).[20] The parallel variation was, however, only fitting for garden colonies or neighborhoods of single-family houses on city peripheries, where parallel streets or pathways were not too far apart from one another. For Plattenbau-settlements, where streets were lined by rows of housing blocks and offset in greater distances with green belts in between, the sequencing method was preferred. In these social housing sites, heavy foot traffic occurred only during the morning and evening when people went to and came back from work.[21] The sequencing method promised to make the street "look livelier," diverting the attention of potential "counter-observers"—not just accomplices but passers-by or curious neighbors.





(left) Figure 1. *Reihenvariante*, date unknown. "Sequenced" variation of the Stasi's observation systems. Source: BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, p. 14. (right) Figure 2. *Parallelvariante*, date unknown. "Parallel" variation of the Stasi's observation systems. Source: BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, p. 17.

By contrast, in densely built, crowded, and organically planned residential neighborhoods, such as the old tenement quarters, the Stasi urged its operatives to follow the "pre-stationing" model (*Vorpostierungsvariante*) (fig. 3). In this method, one

[20] "Beobachtungssysteme," BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, 14-15, 17-18.

[21] Writing on the Plattenbau-settlement in Berlin-Marzahn, historian Eli Rubin explains that the settlement "was constructed so that every resident could walk to either work or school or could walk easily to a public transit stop. There were very few who left their building and hopped into a car to drive away, in contrast to the older neighborhoods." Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 141.

agent was stationed in a building with a clear view (*Sichtpunkt*) of the "moving object." Three agents were positioned on block corners and street intersections towards which the surveilled might approach, and a surveillance vehicle drove towards the target.[22] The Stasi's observation systems thus suggested that, at least at a rudimentary level, surveillance conducted in old housing districts might require more elaborate planning and more human power than in new social housing sites.

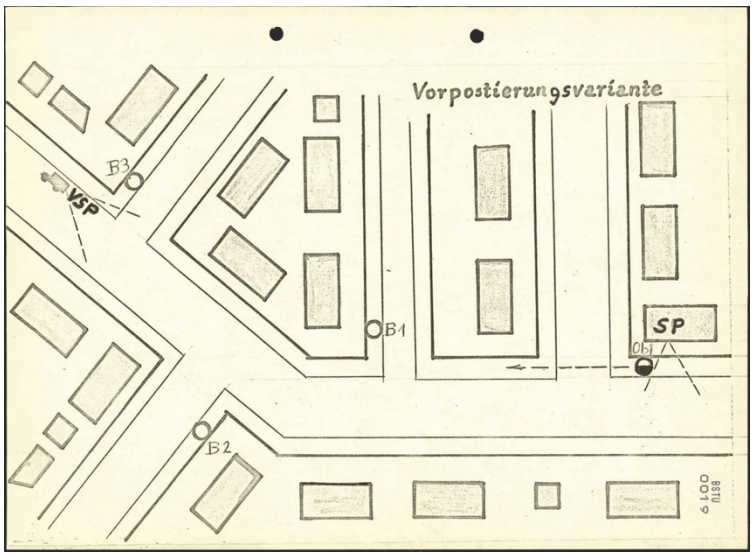


Figure 3. *Vorpostierungsvariante*, date unknown. "Pre-stationing" model of the Stasi's observation systems. Source: BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, p. 19.

While observation systems considered urban morphologies, their successful execution depended on "good collective interplay and prior and extensive knowledge of localities."[23] To produce the local spatial knowledge needed for tailoring these "systems" to a given site, the East German secret police had to visit and document them. This was achieved with operational surveying (*operative Aufklärungsarbeit*), which helped discover spatial relationships between structures, spaces, and persons.[24] The Stasi attended to many spatial characteristics: entrances and exits, sightlines, hidden pathways and throughways, vertical and horizontal circulation, to name a few. These connections were networked to ensure fast, efficient, and secret movements during current and future operations. The secret police inspected, on-site, the frequency of red lights, noted the schedules of nearby public transportation options, commented on the level of street light illumination and when to expect pedestrian or vehicle traffic in an area (fig.4). Examining spatialities and temporalities of the built environment, surveys collected information unavailable on city maps or building blueprints but consequential

[22] "Beobachtungssysteme," BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, 19.

[23] "Beobachtungssysteme," BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, 18.

[24] This largely fell under the responsibility of the state security apparatus' so-called "observation and inquiry line"—the Main Department 8 (*Hauptabteilung VIII*)—which, in assignment of other departments, planned and realized pursuit and observation schemes, as well as house searches and arrests in and outside of the GDR. For an overview of the department's history and range of activities, see: Angela Schmole, *Hauptabteilung VIII: Beobachtung, Ermittlung, Durchsuchung, Festnahme* (Berlin: Bundesbeauftragte für Stasi-Unterlagen (BStU), 2011).

for surveillance operations, nonetheless. The embodied knowledge gained was articulated via various media. Maps, sketches, scaled and unscaled plans, sections, and photographs were supplemented by written reports, legends, annotations, and charts (fig. 5). Diverse survey media helped the Stasi plan foot-tracking operations, mobile and anchored observation, surreptitious entry, and house searches.

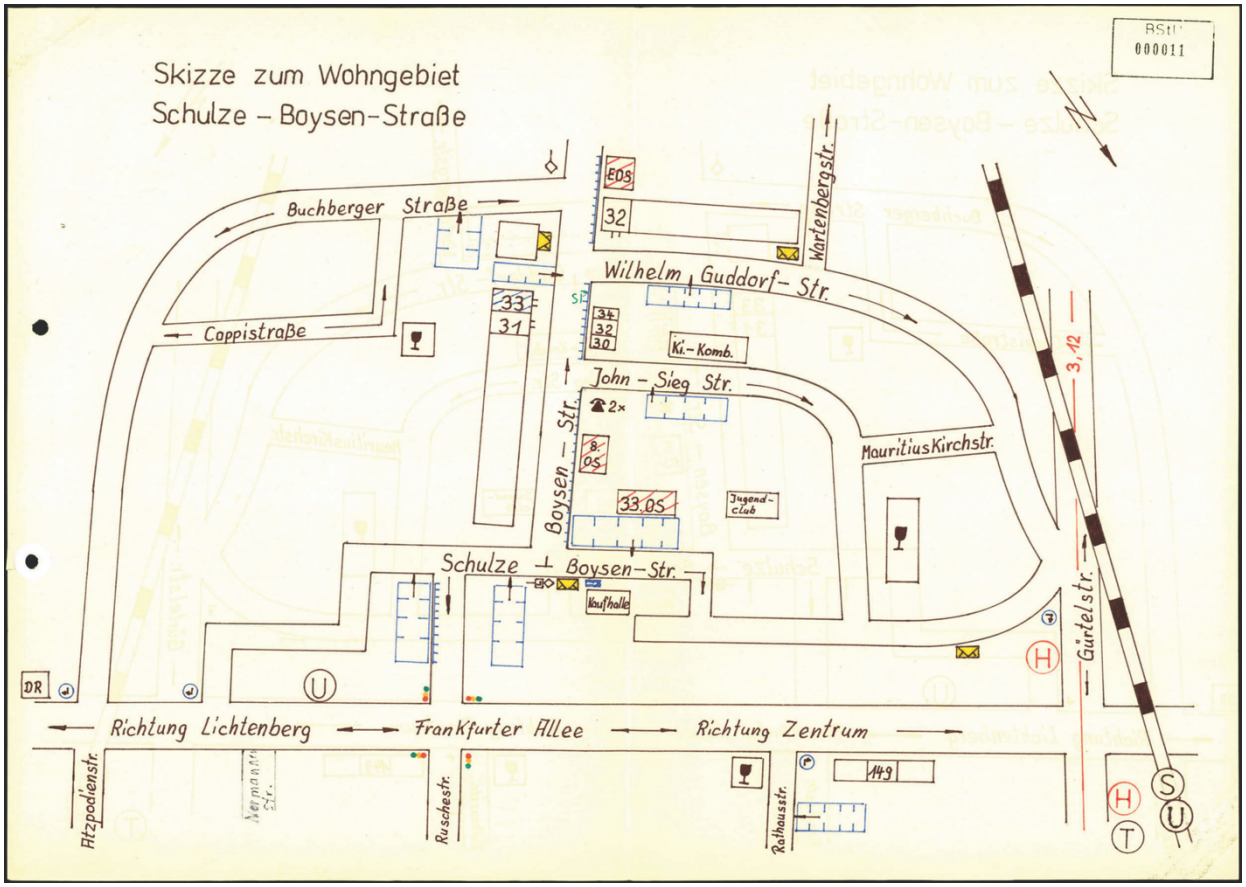


Figure 4. *Skizze zum Wohngebiet Schulze-Boysen-Straße,* 1988. Site plan for a housing survey from Berlin's Lichtenberg neighborhood. The hand-drawn plan shows traffic lights, mailboxes, parking spaces, public facilities, and public transportation options (marked as H, T, S and U) within the vicinity of the targeted housing structure. The target housing is hatched in blue (no. 33) and red hatches indicate buildings offering sightlines or stopover posts. Source: BArch MfS HA VIII 6348, p. 11.

What were the means with which the Stasi registered and reported on the built environment, and how was this spatial knowledge used? A close architectural reading of the Stasi's passageway surveys (*Aufklärung Durchgangshäuser*) helps answer these questions. Passageways between interconnecting courtyards across old building clusters were eminent objects of the Stasi's urban-spatial analysis. As undisciplined spaces occupied by undisciplined bodies, they posed both an advantage and a threat to secret policing. They were also pivotal for adjusting abstract observation systems to specific architectural settings. The East German secret police thus diligently surveyed passageways connecting courtyards and streets by hand-drawing site plans, marking

links, and reporting on access points and routes (fig. 6).[25] To help orient observers, the plans were traced from maps for an accurate representation of scale and proportion. These tracings were done by ruler, suggesting that the plans were prepared at the office instead of on site. The drawings were kept simple: they only showed signposts within the area, such as subway and train stations, parks, squares, and noteworthy buildings. The alternate route offered by the passageway was drawn in color as the focal point of the study. With this spatial analysis, the East German secret police prepared for foot-tracking subjects, who—under possible suspicion of their tail—could take these hidden routes. It also created maps (both mental and material) benefitting surveillance agents' covert approach and getaway. Accompanying written reports described the surroundings step by step: how unkempt the greenery of a courtyard is, or the difference in ground elevation from one courtyard to the next. Such environmental and architectural details were not recorded for a subsequent correction of disorder, as a Foucauldian reading might suggest. Rather, they were distinct identifiers of a place with which agents could verify their locations. The amount of detail covered in these reports also indicates that the Stasi visited the premises in-person but only took notes as sketching on site would have provoked suspicion and elicited unwelcome questions from civilians in the area.

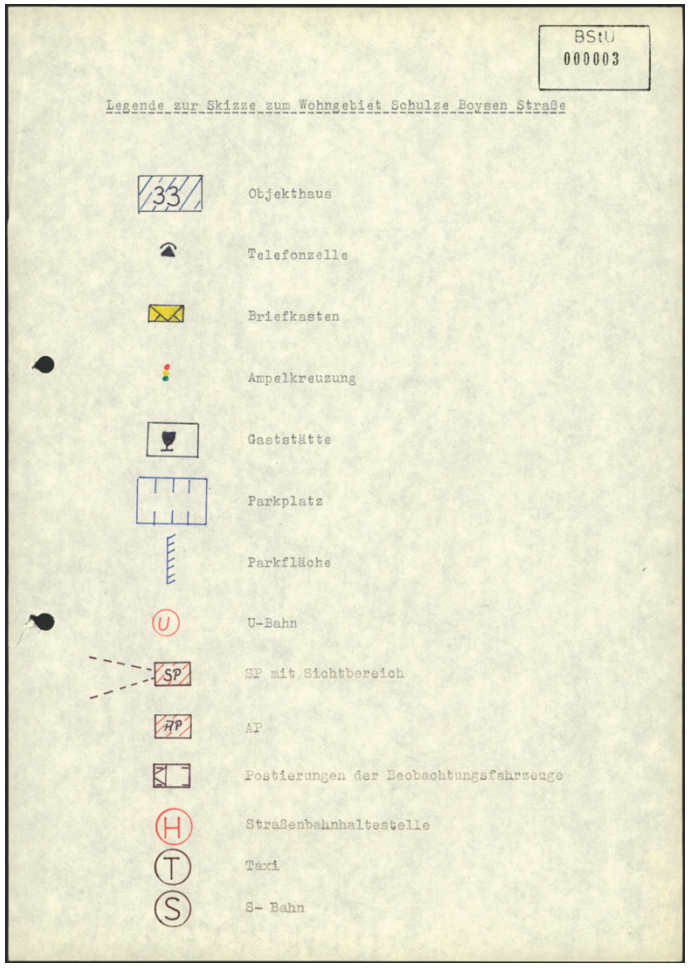


Figure 5. *Legende zur Skizze zum Wohngebiet Schulze-Boysen-Straße*, 1988. Drawn legend accompanying the housing survey above (fig. 4). From top to bottom, listed symbols stand for "object housing," which is the focus of the survey, telephone booth, mailbox, traffic light, restaurant, parking lot, parking space, subway station, sightpost with sightline, stopover post, positioning of observation vehicles, tram stop, taxi, and streetcar terminal. BArch MfS HA VIII 6348, p. 3.

[25] See: "Durchgangshaus im Stadtbezirk Friedrichshain, Mitte, Prenzlauerberg," BArch MfS HA VIII 8032, 1-17.

Once completed, survey materials were catalogued according to spatial themes, with hidden passageways belonging to a folder on shortcuts and safe locations used for path diversions. Cataloguing allowed the secret police to revisit these documents to devise new observation schemes targeting previously surveyed premises. It also made regular verification possible. Surveys were updated according to changing spatial conditions and refined for "objectivity," meaning with the input of multiple agents.[26] Thus, through surveying, the Stasi not only understood better the spatialities within which it had to operate but also mediated them, transmitting its mental map to other agents.

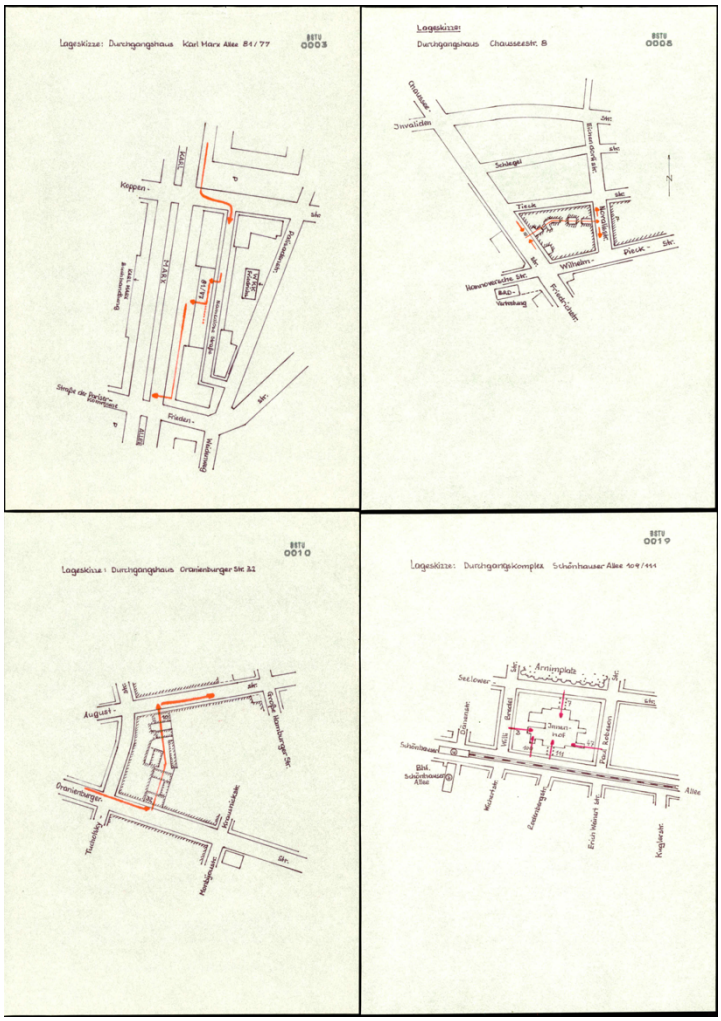


Figure 6. *Lageskizze: Durchganghäuser*, ca. 1981. Berlin "passageway" surveys conducted by the Stasi. Source: BArch MfS HA 8032, p. 3, 8, 10, 19.

[26] Siegfried Suckut, *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit. Definitionen zur "Politisch-Operativen Arbeit,"* 3rd Edition (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2016), 260.

Losing Tail and Losing Sight in Plattenbauten

Was it more complicated to surveil and police old housing settlements, as the Stasi's observation systems and passageway surveys suggest? Plattenbau-settlements presented the East German secret police with some advantages. In contrast to old housing structures, designed and constructed through decentralized processes, blueprints of East German prefabricated housing types were easily available to the Stasi's disposal. These blueprints provided the secret police with elementary knowledge of their spatial configurations prior to surveying efforts. The replicability of building types to various sites brought with it a degree of replicability in surveillance measures targeting them, as well.[27] While the Stasi needed to explore the spatial characteristics of old housing structures individually, at Plattenbau-settlements "personal inspection of the area" could be supported by learning "which new building types are prevalent…and what special features they have," features concerning accessibility and visibility within the building type.[28]

In planning surreptitious entry and pursuit of subjects into prewar and early postwar residential structures, the Stasi had to watch and determine time patterns—garbage collection schedules, visits of postal workers, and general habits of residents—to find out when a building would be generally accessible.[29] The equipment of industrialized housing types with intercom systems changed the rules of accessibility for the Stasi, giving them another advantage. As the entrance doors automatically closed and locked upon entry, there was no point in systematic observation and determination of patterns as the operatives could randomly ask to be buzzed in. In comparison to old housing structures within city centers where neighbors formed a closely-knit community, in the Plattenbauten hundreds of residents lived together and, while people most probably knew who lived on the same floor as them, they certainly did not know everyone in the building.[30]

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[27] Studying the most commonly applied Plattenbau types, the Stasi attempted to develop listening technologies to implement centrally and en masse. See: "Vorschlag über eine neue Realisierungsvariante von oben oder unten in der Wohnungstypen IW 73 bis IW80," BArch MfS BV Karl-Marx-Stadt Abt. 26 168. Other studies included: "Konzeption für den Einsatz der Linie B in Wohnbauten P2 & Q3," BArch MfS BV Karl-Marx-Stadt Abt. Wismut 23; and "Telefonversorgung im Neubautyp QP71," BArch MfS Abt. 26 868, 8-22. There is currently no evidence, however, showing that these plans were realized.

[28] "Dokumentation über den Stadtbezirk Berlin-Marzahn. Erarbeitet von den Jugendkollektiven des Referates 4 der Abt. 3," BArch MfS HA VIII 5192, 11.

[29] See, for instance: "Wohngebietsaufklärung. Dresden Stadtteil Striesen - Bereich Johannes R. Becher Platz," BArch MfS HA VIII 8032, 36-42.

[30] This point has previously been made by: Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 144. As Rubin writes, "it was not uncommon for residents to ring a random bell and ask to be buzzed in because they had forgotten their key or because they needed to use a telephone, which many of Marzahn's buildings had in their lobbies." For further information, see: "Dokumentation über den Stadtbezirk Berlin-Marzahn," BArch MfS HA VIII 5192, 10.

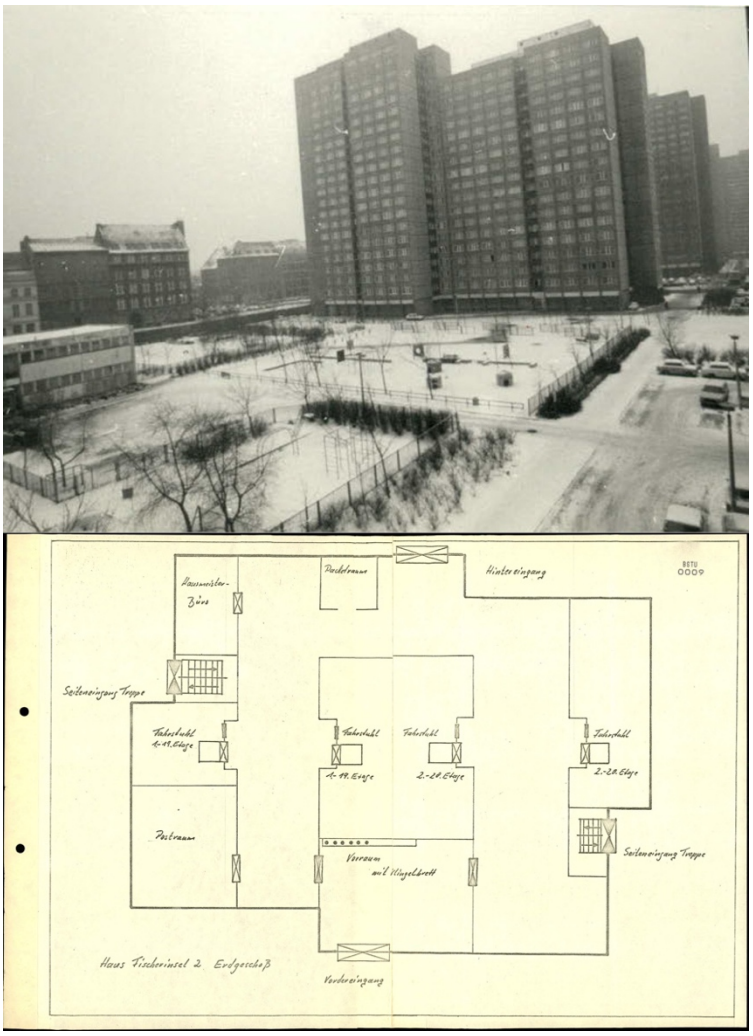

Figure 7. *Aufklärung Fischerinsel 2*, date unknown. Exterior photograph (above) and ground floor plan (below) of the WHH GT 18 type housing on Berlin's Fischerinsel, prepared by the Stasi. Source: BArch MfS HA 8929, p. 7, 9.

Elevators were also considered significant in Stasi surveys, but not necessarily beneficial for surveillance operations. Foot-tracking subjects of interest by the staircase versus the elevator required different approaches. In buildings without an elevator—including Mietskasernen as well as fully industrialized types up to five stories high—the secret police either had to climb ahead, which was difficult to orchestrate as the surveilled entered the premises first, or had to listen to and count their steps to determine their whereabouts within the building. The aural dimension of the staircase communicating information through echo, however, was lost to the elevator. In many housing types, elevators either skipped or stopped between floors, making it impossible to aurally track whether the surveilled was walking upstairs or downstairs thereafter. The

staircase shaft of a Plattenbau with elevators—usually ten or more stories high—simply rendered the steps not distinctly audible. For example, in the twenty-stories high WHH GT 18 (*Wohnhochhaus Grosstafelbauweise*) type residential towers erected on Berlin's Fischerinsel in the early 1970s, there were four elevators, all accessible from the ground floor. Two of these stopped on floors with odd numbers and the other two on those with even numbers (fig. 7).[31] With twelve units on each floor, all connected via a central staircase, the target could be headed anywhere, regardless of which elevator they took. In the most commonly applied housing type, the WBS 70 introduced in 1971, the elevators stopped at every floor but the uppermost, yet the secret police still had to keep physical proximity to and a visual tap on its subjects to determine their destination as there could be up to eight units per floor.[32] In other types, such as the eleven-story high P2, developed in 1965, elevators stopped only on the fourth, seventh, and tenth floor, making it even more difficult to follow a subject without provoking suspicion.[33]

In former Mietskasernen, too, the Stasi had no way of knowing where its targets might be going. They could take the stairs of the block facing the street (*Vorderhaus*) or advance towards the side wings or the back house (*Hinterhaus*), both of which were accessible only through the courtyard. The solution was to determine observation points within the housing complex as a preemptive surveillance measure. Surveying a prewar housing structure in Berlin, the Stasi operatives photographically documented vantage points allowing for the observation of possible movements across the courtyard.[34] At first, these photographs of a seemingly dilapidated building capture its dark corners: opportune hiding places with exclusive views onto the interior windows of the complex. Yet, paying attention to how the Stasi was able to take these images, it becomes clear that they were taken from these very corners: from the windows of the side wing's staircase looking onto the courtyard (fig. 8), or from the semibasement leading from the front lobby to the courtyard (fig. 9). Old housing settlements were crowded and difficult to decipher spatially, but helped both agents and subjects to be out of sight.

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[31] "Aufklärung Fischerinsel 2," BArch MfS HA VIII 8929, 1-9.

[32] Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 144; "Dokumentation über den Stadtbezirk Berlin-Marzahn," BStU MfS HA VIII 5192, 12.

[33] Other architectural and technological differences between the centrally devised and manufactured Plattenbau-types included the weight of standardized prefabricated elements, dimension of housing units, and principle of load-bearing walls. From the early 1960s until the late 1980s, every subsequent type demonstrated a higher degree of rationalization in design and industrial production.

[34] "Haus Voigtstr. 36/37 Bln.-Friedrichshain," BArch MfS HA II 29913, 9-12.

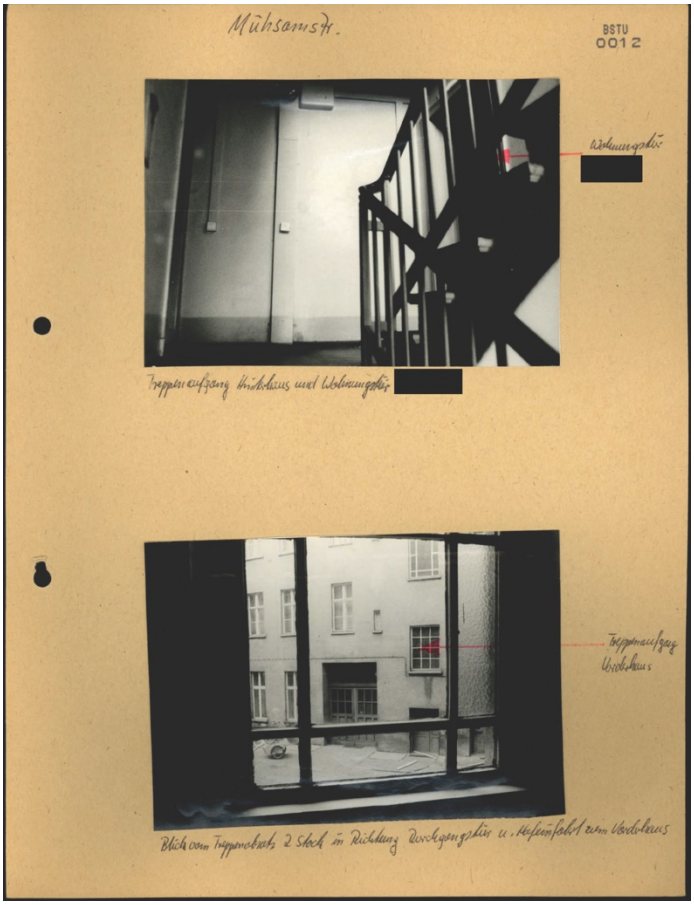

Figure 8. *Haus Voigtstr. 36/37 Bln-Friedrichshain*, date unknown. Photographic documentation of a former *Mietskaserne* in Berlin-Friedrichshain, surveyed by the Stasi. Image above is taken from the staircase of the back house; image below taken from the side wing's staircase, looking onto the exit from the front house into the courtyard. Source: BArch MfS HA II 29913, p. 12.

In prefabricated housing settlements and complexes, by contrast, it was difficult to hide and there were simply more routes of escape for everyone: for surveillance agents and East Germans under their watch. East German prefabricated housing—by virtue of its planning and design—provided its own hard-to-track spatial connections akin to the back alleys, connecting courtyards, and hidden passages between old building clusters. In addition to multiple entrances, exits, staircases, and elevators, corridors of adjacent housing blocks were linked on two or more floors. In the eleven stories high variation of the WBS 70 housing type, for example, the basements and 9th floors of housing assemblages were horizontally connected via throughways between their corridors; leading up to hallways and vertical circulation, and hence linking floors, entrances, and exits of chains of buildings. This meant that a target could enter an eleven-storied WBS 70 type from one block, take the elevator or stairs to reach one of the throughways, and ultimately exit the structure from several blocks down.[35] In the eleven-stories high P2 type housing, these connections existed between the twin housing sections and on floors where the elevators stopped, making it even more difficult to foot-track a suspect alert to being followed. One could potentially enter the building from one section, take the elevator up, move on to the other section, climb up or down the stairs to take the elevator again, and exit the section from its rear door.[36] These were spatial characteristics unique to the new housing stock, and the

[35] Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 144.

[36] "Wohngebietsaufklärung. Dresden Stadtteil Mitte - Bereich Fučíkplatz. Objekthaus Comeniusstr. 12," BArch MfS HA VIII 8032, 29.

Plattenbauten created vertical and horizontal mazes through which the Stasi had to keep physical proximity to and a visual tap on its subjects of surveillance.

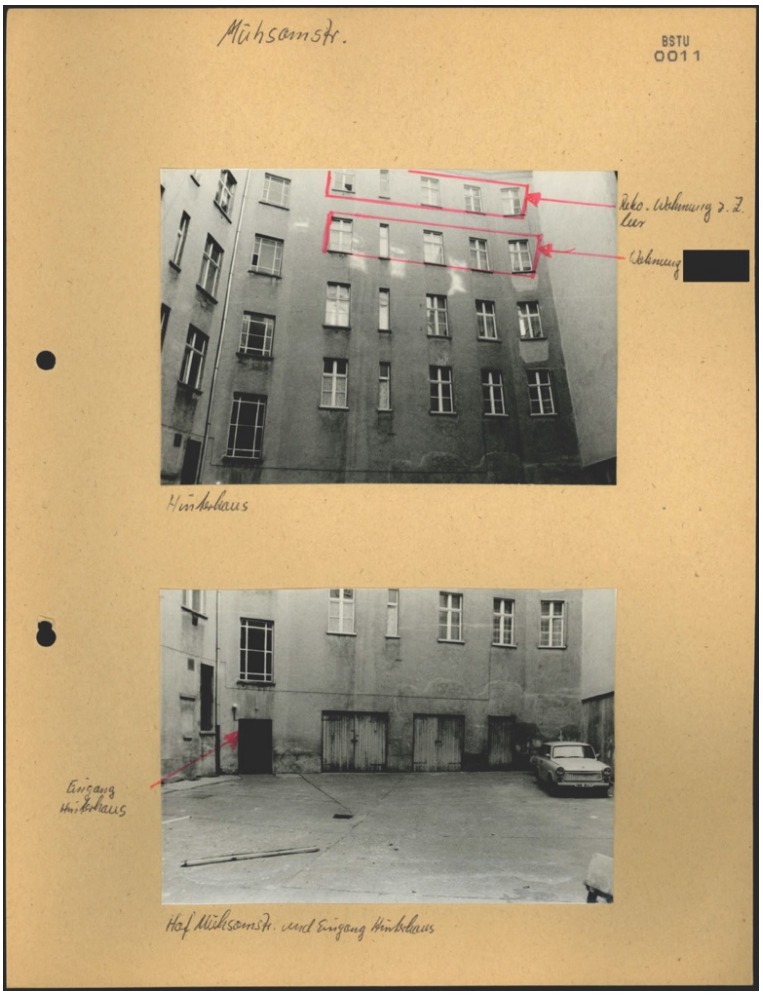

Figure 9. *Haus Voigtstr. 36/37 Bln-Friedrichshain*, date unknown. Photographic documentation of a former *Mietskaserne* in Berlin-Friedrichshain, surveyed by the Stasi. Image above taken from the courtyard; image below taken from the semibasement of the front house, looking onto the entrance of the back house. Source: BArch MfS HA II 29913, p. 11.

For the Stasi's clandestine work, orientation and navigation within the Plattenbauten was similarly intricate as in the GDR's prewar building stock. This complicates the narrative that modernist solutions for the social ordering of space—or, in Scott's terms, state simplification—creates seamless and uniform results for the exercise of state power. Writing on the Plattenbau-settlement in Berlin-Marzahn, historian Eli Rubin states that the Stasi "knew every access point, every piece of technology, every sight line, every angle…knew the spaces of Marzahn better than the

residents themselves."[37] Yet, as I argue, while the Stasi labored to learn new cities like Marzahn, it did so to learn countless other building sites across the GDR.

This surveillance labor did not directly translate into the "economy of power" central to Foucault's panoptic model. The panoptic scheme assures economy in material, personnel, and time by centralizing surveillance, reducing the number of observers, and standardizing processes of information collection, making the power apparatus more "efficient."[38] Considering the Stasi's architectural surveys, however, especially the lengths surveillance agents went to explore, visually mark, and describe the minutiae of the built environment in a process of regular verification, Foucault's concept becomes brittle.[39] The architectural and spatial specificities of old housing sites were not available to the Stasi, but inspecting Plattenbau types did not eliminate "the need for local knowledge," either. Contrary to Rubin's contention, this elementary knowledge did not render the secret police "ready to conduct surveillance and espionage anywhere throughout the country."[40] First, East German housing types were no monoliths, and most standards had at least few regional variations, such as the P2-Halle, WHH 18 "Typ Jena," or WBS70 "Typ Cottbus," which differed in their plan layouts, number of floors, and units per floor, to name a few.[41] These modifications were created due to differences in production capacities, territorial reach, and local needs.[42] Second, typified building methods—regardless of their level of adherence to any centrally-devised standard—still required adjustment to topographic conditions, infrastructure, and roadworks during assembly. This led to alterations in the arrangement of block sequences, interconnecting corridors, and location of back doors,

[37] Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 133.

[38] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206, 218–19.

[39] In fact, the Stasi grew in both budget and employment numbers during periods of relative relaxation, such as the détente years, and domestic surveillance became more intense over the 1970s and early 1980s, which coincided with the expansion of the GDR's mass housing landscape. Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi*, 49–51.

[40] Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 138.

[41] Philipp Meuser, *Vom seriellen Plattenbau zur komplexen Großsiedlung: Industrieller Wohnungsbau in der DDR 1953 -1990*, vol. 1 (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2022), 136–37.

[42] Some features of the centrally devised WBS 70 type, for example, "could not be implemented due to restrictions in production capacities" and territorial "building combines developed regional solutions in consideration of general guidelines and their own material-technical conditions." Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, "Leitfaden für die Instandsetzung und Modernisierung von Wohngebäuden in der Plattenbauweise: WBS 70 Wohnungsbauserie 70 6,3 t" (BBSR Bonn, 1997), 4. For an overview of the modifications to mentioned types, also see: Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, "Leitfaden für die Instandsetzung und Modernisierung von Wohngebäuden in der Plattenbauweise: P2 5,0 t" (BBSR Bonn, 1992), 4–11; Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, "Leitfaden für die Instandsetzung und Modernisierung von Wohngebäuden in der Plattenbauweise: Wohnhochhäuser" (BBSR Bonn, 1993), 3–41.

to name a few, and had significant effects on the principles of circulation and vantage points allowing observation.[43] Ultimately, learning prefabricated types did not endow the Stasi with the panoptic power Rubin ascribes.

One of the implications of Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon is that architecture is epiphenomenal to surveillance as the "physics" of disciplinary power can be architecturally perfected to create homogenous power effects.[44] In the GDR, the state certainly desired to establish a panoptic system, attempting to turn "the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert."[45] Yet, the situated practice of building is much more complex than Foucault acknowledges and, as such, its complicity in assuring a system of full (in)visibility must be questioned.

As this paper has shown, even in projects built on a tabula rasa, designed through centralized processes, and produced with standardized architectural technologies, the East German built environment did not completely lend itself to the panoptic aspirations of state power despite the state's continuous efforts. Plattenbauten, within this context, acted as mass produced and standardized technologies of dwelling *and* of surveillance but fundamentally different from a Foucauldian panoptic architectural technology that is entrenched with the logic of state power, exposing everything but its observers. Plattenbauten facilitated surveillance as their centralization and standardization gave the East German state a leg up, as it were, in devising tactics for observation. They also complicated this system, however, by creating the illusion of uniform replicability and contesting the dissociation of the dialectics of seeing and being seen. This did not occur only in Plattenbauten. Whenever housing structures in the GDR exposed, they exposed both agents and subjects of surveillance, and where they provided a potential for invisibility, it was again available to both. How these frictions potentially facilitated resistant spatial acts in the GDR poses an important and urgent question and, while it is outside of the premises of this paper, it can hopefully be traced by following the discordant footsteps of the watchers.

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[43] Outlining tactics for monitoring the Plattenbau-settlement in Leipzig-Grünau, for example, the Stasi determined that some building clusters created "complicated conditions" for the sort of centralized, anchored observation the Stasi was seeking to establish. While some housing structures faced no other building from which their main entrances could be observed, others lined the street in such a way that their entrances visually blocked each other, making a single and clear sightline of observation for the entire row impossible. BArch MfS BVfS Leipzig Abt VIII 367, 21. In a prefabricated housing complex built within an existing neighborhood, the entrance floor of one typified housing block lead via its exit to another street level due to the topography of the site, which was inaccessible and unobservable from the vantage point of the other exit. See: "Erläuterungsbericht zum Wohngebiet 1055 Berlin, am Friedrichshain 21a," BArch MfS HA VIII 3334, 1-3.

[44] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

[45] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 214.

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